

Fact Sheet

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A Brief History of the U.S. European Command

The first unified command in the European area was established 1 August 1952. The U.S. European Command (EUCOM) was to provide "unified command and authority" over all U.S. forces in Europe. Between 1947 and 1952, the U.S. Air Force, U.S. Navy, and U.S. Army presence in Europe maintained separate commands that reported directly to the Joint Chiefs of Staff. The respective titles of the service commands were: Commander-in-Chief, U.S. Air Forces in Europe (currently USAFE); Commander-in-Chief, U.S. Naval Forces, Eastern Atlantic and Mediterranean (currently U.S. Naval Forces, Europe); and Commander-in-Chief, U.S. European Command.

America's rapid post-war demobilization, followed by the end of the occupation of Germany in 1949, led many to question the U.S. commitment to the defense of Western Europe against the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR). Providing for the common defense was a great concern, especially after the Berlin Crisis of 1948-49 when the Soviet Union blocked access to the divided city and the U.S. and United Kingdom responded with an unprecedented airlift. In 1949 the allies established the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), but did little else to meet their new commitments.

In June 1950 the United States and its allies were jolted into action by the surprise attack on South Korea by Communist North Korea. Early in 1951 NATO established Allied Command Europe and the Supreme Headquarters Allied Powers Europe (SHAPE). General Dwight D. Eisenhower was called from retirement to become the first Supreme Allied Commander Europe (SACEUR).

The U.S. continued to defend Korea, but simultaneously sent massive reinforcements to Europe to deter the USSR from similar aggression there. Between 1950 and 1953 U.S. military manning in Europe grew from 120,000 to over 400,000. U.S. Air Forces in Europe grew from three groups with 35,000 personnel to eleven wings with 136,000 personnel. The Sixth Fleet in the Mediterranean doubled to more than forty warships. U.S. Army Europe grew from one infantry division and three constabulary regiments to two corps with five divisions (including two mobilized National Guard divisions), and in November 1950 activated a new field army, Seventh Army, at Patch Barracks in Stuttgart, Germany. The Army activated the 10th Special Forces Group at Fort Bragg in 1952 and deployed it to Bad Tölz in November 1953 for unconventional warfare missions behind the Iron Curtain.

To provide for national command within NATO, and to help control this build-up of forces, General Eisenhower proposed a separate command for all U.S. forces in Europe. Because the senior U.S. commander would continue as Supreme Allied Commander Europe, Eisenhower recommended giving "a maximum of delegated authority" to a four-star deputy.

Eisenhower returned to the United States just as the new command was established. The first Commander-in-Chief Europe (CINCEUR) was General Matthew B. Ridgway, USA, former commander of Eighth Army and the Far East Command during the Korean War. His deputy was General Thomas T. Handy, USA, former Army deputy chief of staff under General George C. Marshall, USA, and commander of U.S. Army, Europe.

Headquarters EUCOM initially shared the I.G. Farben Building in Frankfurt, Germany, with Headquarters U.S. Army, Europe. In 1954 the headquarters moved to Camp des Loges, a French Army base west of Paris and a short distance from SHAPE. There, EUCOM prepared plans for the defense of Western Europe within the NATO framework against the Soviet Union and other Warsaw Pact countries. EUCOM used the Military Assistance Program to help its NATO partners build their military capabilities, including the German Bundeswehr after 1955. In 1955 EUCOM established a Support Operations Command Europe, soon renamed Support Operations Task Force Europe (currently title: SOCEUR) for special operations missions. EUCOM also assumed responsibility for command and control of U.S. nuclear forces. In 1961 EUCOM began operating an airborne command post, Operation SILK PURSE.

During the Cold War period (1946-1991), EUCOM focused on the USSR but did not deny support to out-of-sector operations; in 1958 it supported a major contingency operation to Lebanon. But the USSR once again became a flashpoint when in 1961 the USSR erected the Berlin wall to stop the hemorrhage of people fleeing Communist rule.

Sharp policy disagreements emerged within NATO in the early 1960s and in 1966 France demanded the removal of all U.S. and NATO headquarters and forces from French soil. The following year SHAPE moved to Mons, Belgium, while Headquarters EUCOM moved to Patch Barracks. Headquarters Seventh Army, which had been located at Patch Barracks, moved to Heidelberg where it merged with Headquarters U.S. Army, Europe. At Patch Barracks EUCOM renovated the buildings, built a new operations center, modernized communications infrastructure and improved the airfield.

Cold War crises continued, including the 1968 invasion of Czechoslovakia by Warsaw Pact countries. But the readiness of U.S. forces in Europe slowly declined due to the Vietnam War and balance of payment problems. Troop strength in Europe fell from over 400,000 in 1953 to 286,708 in 1970. In the 1970s, the Cold War appeared to mellow into an era of détente and negotiations, but tensions remained high as both sides modernized their conventional and nuclear forces; the USSR deployed SS-20 intermediate-range ballistic missiles into Eastern Europe and in 1979 invaded Afghanistan. NATO responded with a "two-track" decision to step up negotiations while deploying U.S. intermediate-range Pershing II missiles and ground-launched cruise missiles to counter the Soviet threat. In addition, force protection concerns in Europe grew as terrorist groups such as the Red Army Faction and the Red Brigades targeted U.S. facilities and personnel with bombings, kidnappings, and assassinations. Palestinian groups brazenly conducted terror operations in Europe, including the kidnapping and subsequent deaths of 11 Israeli athletes during the 1972 Munich Olympic Games.

After the Vietnam War ended in 1975, U.S. forces in Europe grew to over 350,000. In 1980, the Department of the Navy added a U.S. Marine Corps command in Europe. Initially called Fleet Marine Force Europe, the command became Commander, Marine Forces Europe (MARFOREUR) in 1983. The 1983 Unified Command Plan (UCP) transferred responsibility for the Middle East from EUCOM to a new combatant command, U.S. Central Command (CENTCOM), but left responsibility for the "confrontation states" of Israel, Lebanon and Syria to EUCOM. The plan also formally assigned EUCOM for responsibility of Africa, south of the Sahara. The Goldwater-Nichols Act of 1986, together with a powerful Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, General Colin L. Powell, USA, further strengthened the role of combatant commanders. This Act also established the U.S. Special Operations Command, which led to the activation of a new sub-unified command, Special Operations Command, Europe.

The USSR began its first steps towards dissolution in 1985 when Mikhail Gorbachev succeeded Konstantin Chernenko as General Secretary of the Central Committee of the Communist Party. A mere six years later, on 25 December 1991, the Russian ensign replaced the Soviet Union's infamous hammer and sickle. The timing of events proved fortuitous since the Department of Defense's operational focus had shifted to the USCENTCOM area of responsibility (AOR); EUCOM was a supporting command in DESERT STORM. The 2002 UCP assigned responsibility for Russian to EUCOM but this was not always the case. The Joint Staff maintained AOR-control over the USSR during the Cold War and did so more than a decade after the USSR's dissolution in 1991.

In the 1990's, EUCOM reached out to the emerging democracies through programs such as the Joint Contact Team Program, NATO Partnership for Peace, and the National Guard Bureau State Partnership Program. It was also active in peace and stability operations in the Balkans, including Bosnia, Macedonia and Kosovo. But it had to conduct these new missions with fewer assigned forces as its strength fell below 120,000.

Immediately after the terrorist attacks against New York and Washington on 11 September 2001, EUCOM provided major forces for operations in Afghanistan and Iraq and stepped up its efforts to protect U.S. interests in Europe and Africa. Subsequent terrorist attacks in the EUCOM theatre in Casablanca, Madrid, London, and Algiers made it clear that terrorism demanded a collective response. To cope with the complex composition of the terrorist threat, the headquarters stood up the EUCOM Plans and Operations Center (EPOC) in 2003, a fusion center of intelligence, logistics, planning, and manpower functions.

From 2002 to the present, European Command's has provided support to International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) in Afghanistan. European Command's activities to support ISAF operations are extensive and effective. At any given time, approximately 80% of the non-U.S. countries deployed to Afghanistan are from the European theater. EUCOM's support to ISAF is largely focused on preparing these partner nations for deployment to Afghanistan.

In 2006, the Joint Staff tasked EUCOM with taking the lead in standing up a new unified command that would assume control of Africa. Prior to reaching full operational capability, the unit was titled USAFCOM, a subordinate unified command of EUCOM. On 1 October 2008, U.S. African Command (USAFRICOM) stood up, as directed by the 2008 UCP.

Between 2007-2008, EUCOM and its components also worked to build partner-capacity for peacekeeping operations and launched Operation Enduring Freedom-Trans Sahara (OEF-TS) in 2007 while continuing to provide rotational forces to Afghanistan and Iraq. EUCOM also conducted or supported operations such as NOMAD SHADOW, BURNT FROST, NOBLE ENDEAVOR, and ASSURED DELIVERY, the latter a sustainment air bridge humanitarian assistance operation following Russia's 2008 attack on Georgia.

In 2007, U.S. Transportation Command wanted to replace lines of communication that involved seafight to Pakistan and over-the-road transport into Afghanistan, it turned to U.S. European Command for expertise in getting diplomatic approval and establishing a Baltic route traversing Latvia, Russia, Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan (or Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan) and a Caucasus route across Georgia, Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan. The first shipment along the NDN left on February 20, 2009. By 2012, the Northern Distribution Network handled about 40% of Afghanistan-bound traffic, compared to 30% through Pakistan.

In the August 2008 in an effort to strengthen the important strategic partnership between the Republic of Poland and the United States, the U.S. performs quarterly rotations of Patriot Batteries to Poland, enhancing U.S.-Poland air and missile defense cooperation. These rotations are to familiarize Polish Armed Forces with the Patriot Missile System and have permitted U.S. Forces to share related tactics, techniques, and procedures on missile defense.

In September 2009 deactivation of Task Force Dayton, the last U.S. entity operating in Bosnia-Herzegovina. European Command has played a significant role in Bosnia's progress since the 1995 implementation of the Dayton Accords. At the height of OPERATION JOINT ENDEAVOR in 1996, more than 20,000 U.S. service members served in Bosnia.

In 2011, when the Libyan Civil War erupted, EUCOM was the supporting command to USAFRICOM as it led Operation ODYSSEY DAWN. However, since USAFRICOM did not have its own component command, EUCOM, US. Air Forces Europe; U.S. Army Europe, and U.S. Marine Forces Europe provided manpower augmentation, contingency planning, communications connectivity and infrastructure, logistical support from bases within EUCOM's AOR, and basing/overflight rights.

In December of 2012 EUCOM, in response to Turkey's dedication of Article 5 of NATO Defense Treaty, with the Netherlands and Germany sent three batteries of Patriots Missiles to that country. This a result of the growing tensions between Turkey and Syria from the Syrian Civil War.

For more than 60 years, EUCOM, as either an element of the Joint Staff or of NATO, has helped keep the peace in Europe, the Middle East, and Africa. As it transforms for the future, it will continue to meet new challenges.